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Mentoring Program Prepares Future Educators for Online Classroom

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- For most Cedarville University education majors, teaching in a traditional classroom has always been their dream. But in a time when online education is booming, an innovative mentoring program is preparing them for the nontraditional classroom.

Dr. Jeremy Ervin, associate professor of education, started online educator mentoring two years ago. Rebecca Traeger, director of teacher education services, and Dr. Tianhong Zhang, assistant professor of education, now administer the program, which partners with 15 mentor teachers at Ohio Connections Academy and with four mentor teachers at the Ohio Virtual Academy. Both organizations teach students in kindergarten through grade 12.

Cedarville education majors can jump-start their teaching experience through e-learning and online educator mentoring as early as freshman and sophomore year. They are prepared to integrate educational technology through teaching in diverse contexts.

"Teachers need to rethink how they can integrate educational technology into a faith-based vision of education," Zhang said. "Christian teachers, like any competent professional, need opportunities to keep abreast of these curricular and instructional innovations."

Students complete a semester-long integration project as part of their field experience, which allows them to work closely with their mentor teacher. They are required to spend 15 hours observing an online live classroom, learning how teachers instruct in that type of environment.

Cedarville education majors learn how to teach content that is uploaded online, teach students when they don't see them everyday, organize their teaching content and manage their time when trying to condense content into a 50-minute virtual class. This online class structure requires that teachers stick with a closely followed plan that doesn't permit as much flexibility as a physical classroom would.

Education majors also learn about the challenges teachers face in an online class. "In the physical classroom, parents typically have no problem understanding what is going on," Zhang said. "But in the online classroom, the teachers also have to teach parents how to have their children engage with the online context."

Education majors have found the online teacher mentoring experience enlightening and helpful. Allison May, a sophomore early childhood education major from Hart, Michigan, learned how to structure an online class for second graders alongside her mentor teacher, Meghan Kinat, from Ohio Connections Academy.

For Mary Kronk, a sophomore early childhood education major from West Jefferson, Ohio, it was helpful to speak with a mentor teacher who had taught in a brick-and-mortar school and then transitioned to an online classroom.

“It was interesting to see how my mentor teacher made the lessons engaging and interesting for students,” Kronk said. “Ultimately putting the students and their learning first and ordering the class in a way that promotes this enriched my own understanding of what it means to be a teacher.”

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,380 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, [including the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.